

Case Statement for Active Transportation for the Mystic River Communities

Background

The Mystic Valley Active and Safe Transportation Network (Mystic VAST-Net) includes the communities of Somerville, Chelsea, Everett, Malden and Medford and Boston's Charlestown neighborhood. The communities encompass an area of 25 square miles including 3.5 acres within 1/2 mile of the Mystic River and its tributaries. These communities have a population of 850,000 people and a population density of nearly 12,000 people per square mile.

These communities are collaborating on efforts to promote and guide economic and open space development along the Mystic River corridor in order to revitalize an underdeveloped area, to promote active transportation as a key component of that redevelopment and to create a high quality riverfront area that enhances the quality of life for both new and existing residents of these communities. Chelsea, Everett and Somerville have recognized environmental justice communities.

The community development officials working on the Mystic River planning initiative under the leadership of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council have joined with local advocacy groups and health care providers to develop this initiative. The communities have focused on ways the initiative can promote economic development and add to the quality of life. Advocacy groups such as WalkBoston, the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition and Bike to the Sea, Inc. work to promote walking and bicycling. These groups support improving the existing road and sidewalk network to ensure safer and more convenient travel for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as creating a system of multi-use trails to provide routes that prioritize active transportation. The Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership and Groundwork Somerville support efforts to create an active transportation corridor along the new Greenline Extension and Community Path.

Health organizations such as the Cambridge Alliance (serving Somerville, Everett and Malden) and Health Malden seek to support effort to create community environments that support active lifestyles for people of all ages

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation Recreation serves as the major landowner along the Mystic River and is currently developing a Master Plan for its property including a trails network. DCR owns and maintains the high successful Charles River Trail system and is looking to replicate the success of that system along the Mystic River.

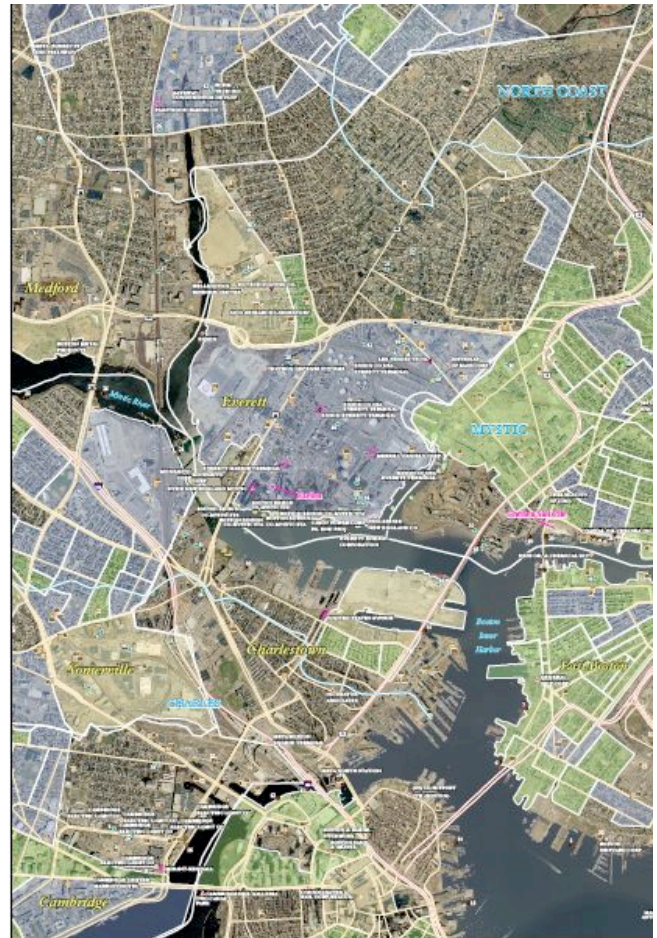


Figure 1 – Aerial of Mystic Valley Region

Major developers along the Mystic River support active transportation as a means to create high quality, attractive commercial and residential communities. Neighborhood groups such as the Charlestown Neighborhood Association and East Somerville Neighbors for Change support the effort to create more walkable and bikeable communities to improve neighborhood quality of life and to allow neighbors to better enjoy the Mystic River Waterfront.

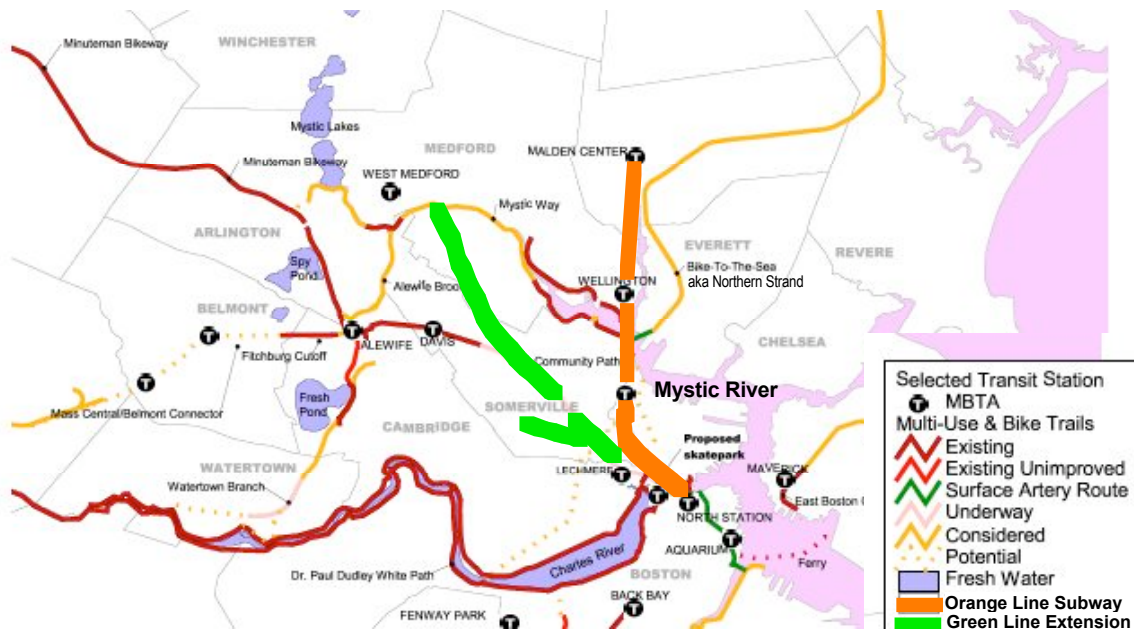
“What could the Mystic River communities achieve with a \$50 million federal investment in bicycling & walking?”

1. Create Safe Routes to Transit and “Trails to Transit” Programs

The area has strong and improving transit service via the MBTA Orange Line and bus service. Transit service improvements in planning stages include the extension of the Green Line trolley to Somerville and Medford and the Urban Ring Bus Rapid Transit service through all the communities. Orange Line stations built in the 1970’s have inadequate connections for pedestrians and bicycles. A “Safe Routes to Transit” program will focus on providing better pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing Orange Line Stations and future Green Line and Urban Ring stations. Pedestrian improvements will include improving streetscapes leading to the Bunker Hill station in Charlestown, Sullivan Square Station on the Somerville/Boston Line and Malden Center Orange Line station. Additionally, design and construction of connections to new Green Line stations through Somerville and Medford will be accomplished including the development of the Somerville Community Path extension. The existing Community Path allows 500 pedestrians an hour to access the existing Red Line Station in Somerville. “Safe Routes to Transit” will also include enclosed, secure bicycle parking at the most heavily used stations.

Figure 2

**Mystic Valley
Trails to Transit / Safe Routes to Transit**



Based on: May 2003 Map by Bryce Nesbitt, bryce2@obviously.com

The Orange and Green Lines and the Urban Ring offer opportunities to create “Trail to Transit” connections. The Mystic River Paths (see below) will connect directly to an newly constructed Orange Line Station at Assembly Square. The Alewife Brook and Mystic River trail system will be improved to allow connections between Medford and the terminus Green Line Station near the Mystic River in Somerville. The Urban Ring will also intersect with the Community Path in East Somerville. The Malden River Trails and the Northern Strand Community Trail in Malden, Everett and Medford will also connect to the Urban Ring. Trail to Transit connections can also be created in Chelsea.

2. Create a Trail Network for Bicycle Commuters along the Lower Mystic River

The communities sit fewer than six miles north of Downtown Boston and Cambridge a distance convenient for bicycle commuting yet bicycle commuting in the communities north of the Mystic River is significantly less than those north of the Mystic River. Table 1 compares the mode shares for walking and bicycling in communities south and north of the Mystic River. The percentages of commuters bicycling in the communities just north of the Mystic River are between 6 and 40 times less than those in Somerville and Cambridge to the south. The percentage of commuters who walk is also less in the communities north of the River.

Table 1 – Mode Share for Journey to Work

	2000	2000	2000	2000	
City	Workers	Bicyclists	%	Walk	%
South of Mystic					
Somerville	44,807	1251	2.8%	4122	9.2%
Boston - only	278,463	2705	1.0%	36,323	13.0%
Cambridge	54,969	2143	3.9%	13,409	24.4%
North of Mystic					
Chelsea	12,574	62	0.5%	824	6.6%
Malden	29,119	89	0.3%	1045	3.6%
Everett	17,818	14	0.1%	839	4.7%
Revere	20,529	50	0.2%	489	2.4%
Lynn	38,360	72	0.2%	1773	4.6%
Saugus	13,217	31	0.2%	173	1.3%

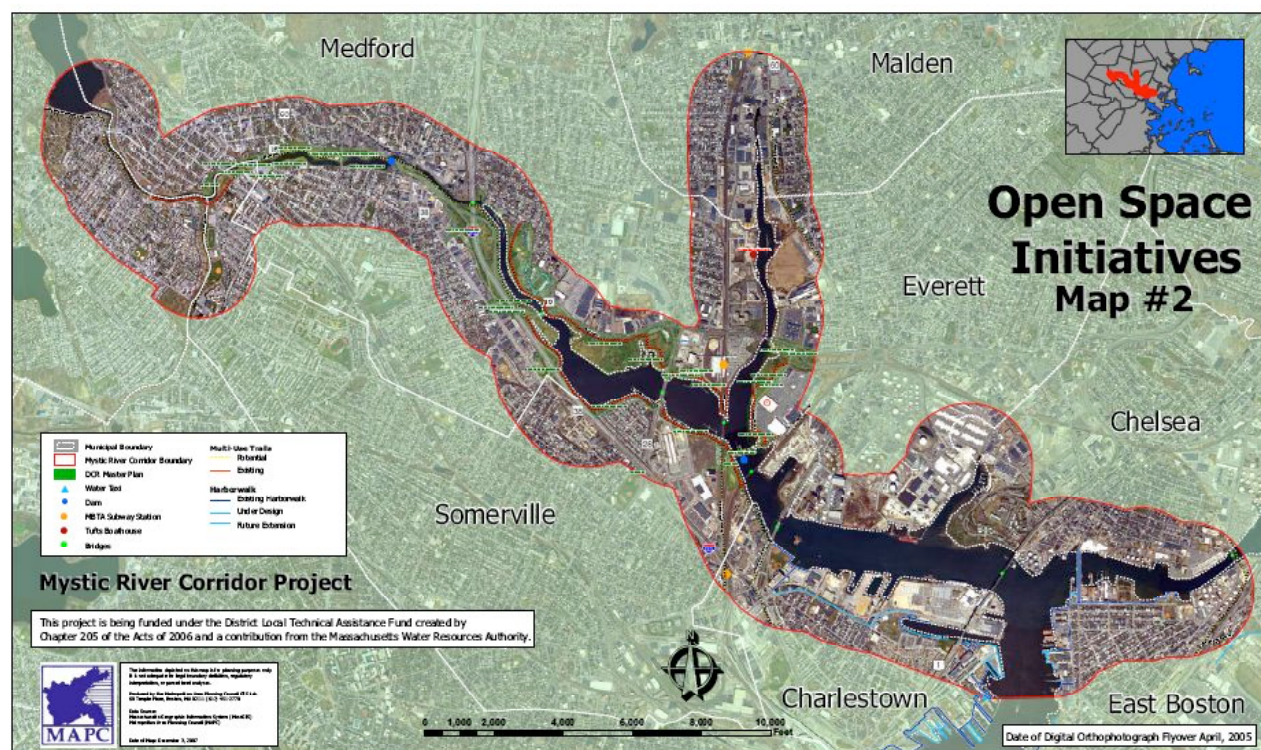
This dramatic difference in mode share indicates that the Mystic River serves as a major barrier to bicycle and pedestrian commuting between the communities north and south of the River. The Mystic River and the regional road system serve as significant barriers for bicycle commuting rates in communities north and east of the Mystic River (Malden, Medford, Everett and Chelsea) where bicycle commuting rates are six times lower than those to the west such as Somerville. The major bridges and tunnels (Tobin, Zakim-Bunker Hill and I-93 Bridges and the Sumner, Callahan and Ted William Tunnels) across the Mystic, Charles River and Boston Harbor exclude bicycles and pedestrians while the minor bridges such the Wellington (Rt 28) and Malden Bridge (Rt 99) carry large volumes of regional truck traffic and local commute traffic to Boston.

In 2006 the Mystic River Watershed Association studied the current condition of the Mystic River watershed; and developed the Mystic River Action Plan for addressing continuing problems in the watershed. One key action was to improve access to the River. Pedestrian and bike access along the waterfront in the Mystic River Watershed and connections with larger regional efforts was identified as a

high priority because connections support coordination across projects that enhance the recreational and transportation value of each individual part of the regional network.

The Mystic River watershed has a number of pedestrian and bike paths, although they are not well connected. The Minuteman Commuter Bikeway is a very popular path that runs from the Alewife T station in Cambridge through Arlington and Lexington to Bedford. There are bike paths on DCR lands along the Mystic River in Medford and Somerville and in the Middlesex Fells. The value of the Mystic River Reservation paths would be greatly enhanced by connecting to the Minuteman via the parkland along Alewife Brook (which is called for in the DCR's Alewife Reservation Master Plan), and to Boston with an extension through Charlestown.

Figure 3 – Mystic River Trail System



There are a variety of plans for paths that would knit together a rich network throughout the region. For example:

- The Mystic Crossing group is advocating for pedestrian and bike access across the Amelia Earhart Dam. This crossing would connect Draw 7 Park and the Assembly Square area of Somerville with the future Bike to the Sea path (see below.) This crossing would also provide greater access to the Gateway Center Park, which is currently underutilized. An EPA enforcement settlement with Exelon has provided \$250,000 to plan this connection.
- The proposed Bike-to-the-Sea path [aka the Northern Strand] would run from the center of Malden through Everett to Revere Beach, with possible connections to the Mystic Reservation bike paths.
- The East Boston Greenway would use an abandoned railroad right-of-way, donated to the Boston Natural Areas Fund in 1996, to connect marshes, beaches, playing fields, Logan Airport, MBTA

stations, and residential areas throughout the East Boston community. In the future, the greenway will be extended to Belle Isle Marsh, on the northern edge of Boston, next to Revere, largely on MDC-owned land. The Chelsea Riverway is being planned by the Chelsea Creek Restoration Partnership and the National Parks Service, would run along an unused rail line along Chelsea Creek, and would connect to the East Boston Greenway.

- The Somerville Community Path is a proposed linear park that would link to the Minuteman and the Red Line Linear Park, and run to Lechmere in Cambridge.
- Plans for Assembly Square include a connection along the Mystic River under the Wellington Bridge, which would connect to the DCR Mystic Reservation on the Somerville side and to the paths in Draw 7 Park, linking the entire Somerville waterfront.
- A proposed Tri-Community Bikeway through Woburn, Winchester and Stoneham would connect the Mystic River, the Middlesex Fells and the Bike-to-the-Sea path.
- Paths along the Malden River are being planned as part of the former TeleCom City project, now known as Rivers' Edge.

Section 4 of the Mystic River Action Plan identified key actions to improve linkages along and access to the River:

4.5 Continue efforts to complete key links in the pedestrian paths and bikeways throughout the watershed, in concert with regional efforts to enhance the network of paths. High priorities for action include the Bike to the Sea path, the Somerville Community Path, pedestrian and bike access across Amelia Earhart Dam and through the MBTA property near Sullivan Square, the Chelsea Creek Riverway, the East Boston Greenway, the Eastern Ave/B&M Path in Chelsea, links along Malden River (including the former Tele-Com City Paths), extension of the paths along the Mystic River (as addressed by the upcoming DCR Mystic Master Plan), extending the Alewife Brook path (as described in the DCR Master Plan for the Alewife Reservation), the Tri-Community Bikeway linking Stoneham, Winchester and Woburn, the Charles River/Minuteman Connector, River and connecting to the Boston Harbor Walk through Charlestown.

4.6 Enhance Public Participation policies at boat clubs located on DCR lands, with an emphasis of opportunities for the public to use the waterfront.

4.7 Identify locations for improved public canoe and kayak access.

4.8 Publicize the recreational assets of the watershed with a revised Blueways and Greenways map, including the new Village Landing, Gateway Plaza and Schraffts parks.

Implementing the provisions of the action Plan will create an interconnected trail system that can be utilized by bicycle commuters to avoid heavy traffic on Route 28 and Route 99 on their commute to Boston and Cambridge.

3. Improve Waterfront Access in Order to Support Revitalization of Adjoining Neighborhoods and Business Areas

The Mystic River communities were first established to take advantage of the transportation access and connections the River provides and yet most of their neighborhoods and business districts have little connection to the river. The communities realize both individually and collectively that providing better access to the waterfront will allow them to take advantage of the river as a resource once again.

The Mystic River Corridor Strategy project is a collaborative effort between MAPC, the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Cities of Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford and Somerville. The Corridor Strategy is intended to create a collective vision for the river corridor and a strategy to achieve that vision. Working with the BRA, the cities and a wide array of stakeholder organizations, MAPC will help the communities develop a targeted strategy that will advance the goal of realizing the full potential of the Mystic River.

Key Issues Identified by the Project identified several key issues (December 11, 2007)

Issue #1: Integrate concerns for impacts on the Mystic River in the review of development, redevelopment and major regional projects.

The Mystic River corridor is the site of many significant development projects as well as transportation projects including, but not limited to, Rivers Edge, the Green Line Extension, Assembly Square and the Mystic River Reservation Master Plan. Smaller scale road and bridge projects also play an important role in access, connectivity and enjoyment of the open space resources....

Issue #2: Develop a regional strategy for open space land protection and acquisition to ensure access, connectivity and an equitable distribution of open space.

.... Active Transportation will be a vital part of the economic and environmental revival of the Mystic and Malden River corridors. A connected trail system will be developed allowing existing and new residential neighborhoods in Medford, Somerville, Charlestown, Chelsea, Everett and Malden to connect to new job and retail centers along the Mystic River including Assembly Square in Somerville, River's Edge in Medford, Everett and Malden, Chelsea, the Schrafft's Center and Charlestown Navy Yard in Charlestown. These efforts will support the Mystic River Master Plan

Medford Mystic River Greenway (2006 Study)

The many waterfront assets found in Medford, a regional greenway system would draw Medford residents and visitors to and along the river, attracted by new connectivity and activities. The Mystic River Greenway will run from the Alewife Brook Greenway to Station Landing/Wellington Station. The proposed path runs through land owned by the City of Medford and the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR); as such, the City will have to further cultivate a strong working relationship with DCR. The greenway provides an opportunity to improve the ecological health of the river, create opportunities for passive and active recreation along its banks, and to involve residents, businesses and institutions in shaping the greenway.

The Active Transportation Initiative will help all the communities involved in the Mystic River Corridor Initiative realize their individual and collective plans for revitalization of the River such as in:

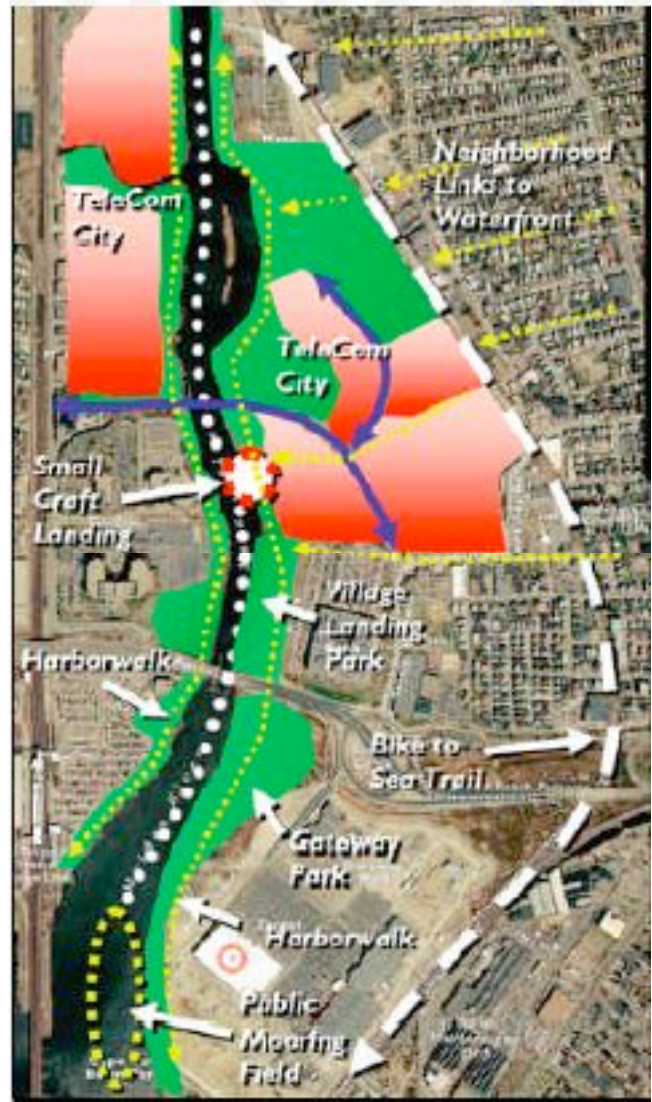
- **Charlestown:** paths along the Mystic River near the Schrafft's Center can be connected to Medford Street and beyond;

- **Somerville:** connections can be made between the new mixed-use district and MBTA station at Assembly Square and Sullivan Square in Charlestown;
- **Medford:** existing trails can be connected into a network that stretches from downtown Medford, past Wellington MBTA station to the River's Edge project and can also connect to proposed water transportation;
- **Malden:** Downtown can be connected to the River's Edge project via the River and the Northern Strand Trail; and
- **Everett:** neighborhoods and new condominiums can be connected to the River's Edge Project, proposed water transportation and Wellington MBTA station.

Everett Waterfront Study (2002):

There is great potential to create a continuous system of public access along the Malden River and within the Mystic River Mixed Use District. Such public access would provide a critical link for the Bike to Sea trail. There may be potential to add point access in the northern portion of the Island End River. There are existing areas, such as the Village Landing Park, where restrictions to public access need to be eliminated. The City is working with the bank to remove such restrictions where

Figure 4 – Neighborhood Connections



4. Establish An Urban River Ring Linking the Charles River, Alewife Brook and the Mystic River

The Department of Conservation and Recreation has in recent years developed Master Plans for the Charles River Basin and the Alewife Brook Reservation and is in the process of developing one for the Lower Mystic Reservation. These plans when viewed as a whole create the potential for an “Urban River Ring” of trails and paths running along that creating a loop that includes the Charles River, Alewife Brook and Mystic River trail systems including Fresh Pond Parkway.

The DCR’s Mystic River Master Plan, with an estimated budget of \$250,000, intends to create increased public access to the waterfront and would include the redevelopment of parks in Somerville, Chelsea and East Boston as well as the boat clubs along the shores of the Mystic.

Figure 5 - Urban River Ring



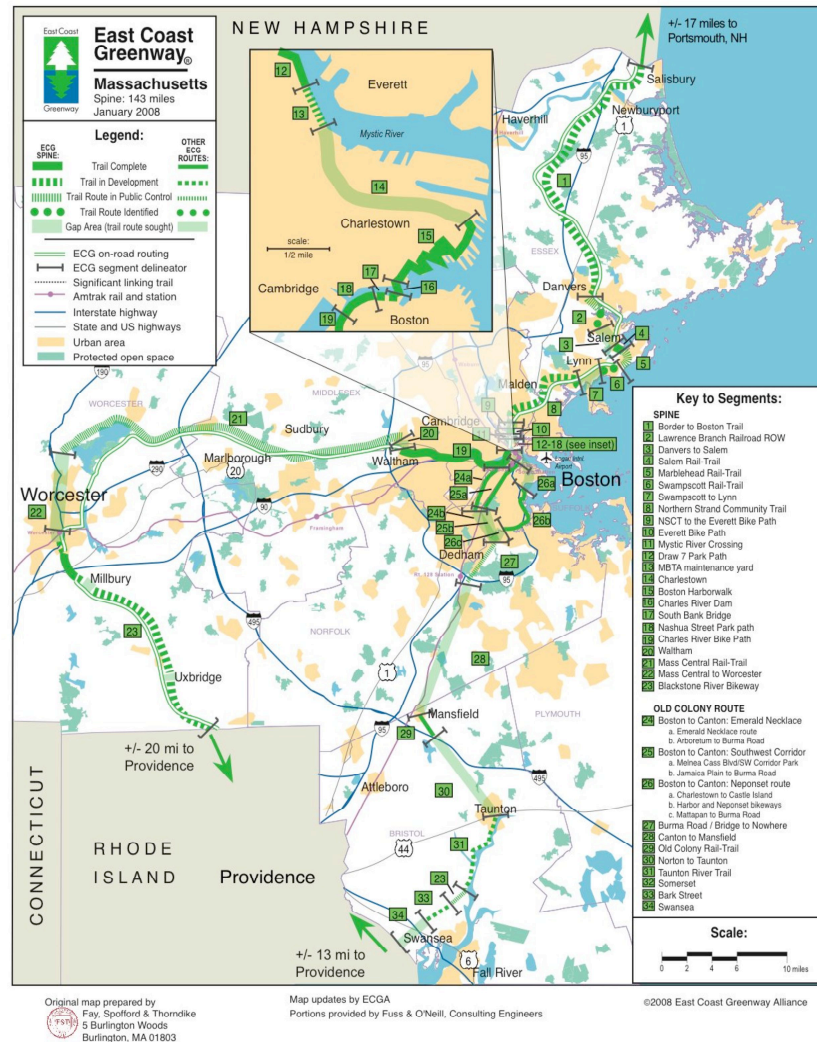
5. Connect to Statewide and National Trail Systems

The trail systems created by the communities will ensure that state and national trails will connect into the Boston area.

State Level: The MA Central Rail Trail will begin near North Station in Boston, travel up the Community Path extension that parallels the Green Line extension through Somerville and then follow the existing Community Path onto Cambridge, Belmont and to Western Massachusetts.

National Level: The East Coast Greenway will run down the Charles River Basin and connect to the Mystic River Basin near the Charlestown Navy Yard, pass up through Sullivan Square at the Boston, Somerville Line, traveling across a new bridge spanning between Assembly Square to Gateway Center in Everett and connect to the Northern Strand leading from Malden to Lynn. This will provide opportunities for green tourists who are interested in traveling to historic sites in Salem or Lexington and Concord.

Figure 6 - Connection to State and National Trails



6. Realization of Health Benefits of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation within the Mystic River Communities

The MAPC Bike Plan: Active Transportation will further the goal and strategies for increasing bicycle transportation set forth in the March 2007 MAPC Bicycle Plan:

1. Encourage more trips by bicycle in each community
2. Make bicycling and bicycle accommodations a part of “standard operating procedure”
3. Improve evaluation and prioritization of bicycle project proposals
4. Assist and encourage local initiatives
5. Work with state and federal agencies to simplify and coordinate funding programs
6. Increase regional knowledge about bicycling

The Cambridge Health Alliance works in many of the Mystic River communities and has been actively involved in promoting healthier lifestyles. Somerville has been one of 25 communities selected by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Active Living By Design program. Through this effort Somerville has developed a pedestrian and bicycle safety plan known as Safe-START. The plan proposes measures through-out Somerville to improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists, particularly at locations with the highest numbers of pedestrians and bicycle crashes.

The Active Transportation initiative will further goals of the MAPC Bicycle Plan to improve connections to transit by completing the “Wellington Greenway” that will connect Wellington MBTA station to the Mystic Landing and River’s Edge Projects, the Northern Strand Trail to the future Urban Ring Stations in Everett and Chelsea and the Mystic River Reservation to Medford Center and the new MBTA Station in Assembly Square in Somerville.

One challenge for many of the communities is the lack of in-house capacity and expertise to promote, plan and implement bicycle and pedestrian programs and projects. Additionally, municipal staff often lack the time to co-ordinate the planning and management of regional projects. The VAST-Net will develop a team of regional “circuit riders” with expertise to assist the communities plan, promote and implement bicycle and pedestrian programs and projects. Experts will assist communities review their local zoning requirements as they relate to walking and bicycling and work with the communities to develop ordinance amendments and policies to support active transportation. Promotional programs will focus on encouraging residents to walk and bicycle as new, safer facilities are implemented and employers to provide programs and facilities that encourage active transportation such transit passes, bicycle racks and showers. These experts will also work with local school districts to support programs to improve and/or implement “Safe Routes to School” programs in each community and to support the development to joint wellness education curriculum that offers classroom education on Active Transportation, programs teaching bicycling, bicycle safety and walkability assessments. The circuit riders will also help coordinate and prepare plans and funding applications for regional active transportation improvements. Professional development programs for planners, engineers and department of public works staff will be developed to build the long-term in-house capacity of the communities to manage and maintain active transportation infrastructure.

Another part of the plan will be to develop strategies to help re-establish bicycle shops in the communities with low bicycle commuting mode share. Malden, Everett, Chelsea, East Somerville and Charlestown lack full service bicycle retailers that can repair bicycles, sell parts and accessories. The strategy will investigate options including “BikeStations” near transit stations, providing business development support

for potential bicycle shop owners and establishing non-profit community bicycle shops that provide training to youth and adults on bicycle repair and maintenance.

Goals for Mystic River Active Transportation Initiative

- Increased pedestrian and bicycle activity to transit stations along with decreasing numbers of accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Increase overall the overall mode share of pedestrian and bicycles in the communities;
- Double bicycle mode share in Somerville to at least 6% and increase bicycle mode share to at least 3% in other communities;
- Support the development of at least one “transit-orientated development” project in each community; and
- Re-establish bicycle repair locations in communities that currently lack them.

The Mystic Valley Active and Safe Transportation Network develop a plan to achieve these goals by:

1. Developing an overall plan of action with priorities for implementation;
2. Implementing selected elements of the plan that best achieve the goals of the initiative;
3. Creating trail network for multiple uses by connecting existing trails and creating new trails.

The planning stage will identify the key elements of the Mystic Valley Active and Safe Transportation Network, identify the approximate costs of each element, an assessment of the key implementation barriers and strategies to overcome those barriers.

Implementation will focus on the elements of the plan that best achieve the goals of the initiative in an expeditious and cost-effective manner. Key projects will prioritize trail projects that eliminate the most significant barriers to regional active transportation travel.

The VAST-Net team will develop an evaluation program that will allow annual progress reports to be developed that will measure the success in achieving these goals.

Current Mystic River Active Transportation Participants

Municipal Participants

City of Somerville: Stephen Winslow, Senior Planner / Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinator

City of Boston: Nicole Freedman, Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinator

City of Everett: Marzie Galzka, Community Development Director

City of Chelsea: John DePriest, Planning Director

City of Medford: Claudia Stoker-Long, Department of Planning & Community Development

City of Malden: Debbie Burke, Malden Redevelopment Authority

Regional Participants

Metropolitan Area Planning Council: Barbara Lucas, Director of Transportation Planning

Department of Conservation and Recreation: Dan Driscoll, Mystic River Master Plan Project Manager

Non-Profit Contacts

WalkBoston: Wendy Landman, Executive Director

MassBike: David Watson, Executive Director

Charlestown Neighborhood Association: Ivey St. John

Cambridge Health Alliance: Lisa Brukilaccio

Healthy Malden: Kevin Duffy

Mystic River Watershed Association: John Reinhardt

East Coast Greenway Alliance: Eric Weiss

Bike to the Sea, Inc.: Pete Sutton

State Contacts

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority: Eric Scheier, Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner

Political Strategy:

Step 1: Have Mystic River Corridor Strategy Mayors and the DCR Commissioner sign letters in support of the initiative

Step 2: Solicit support from local health organizations such as the Cambridge Health Alliance and Healthy Malden and local environmental organizations such as the Mystic River Watershed Alliance, WalkBoston, MassBike, the Chelsea Greenspace Alliance and Bike to the Sea, Inc..

Step 3: Solicit support from major business and property owners along the Mystic River including:

- Flatley Companies and Massport in Charlestown
- Federal Investment Realty Trust in Somerville
- Station Landing and River's Edge Projects in Medford
- GE Site and Brittany Place property owners in Everett
- Malden Chamber of Commerce and Combined Properties
- Chelsea businesses

Step 4: Convene Federal and State legislators to a "summit" to inform them of the importance of the initiative to the region.

Step 5: Gain Support of Federal Legislators for the effort to include Active Transportation in the next Federal Transportation Bill